

NOV 19 1965

CAPITOL STUFF

By TED LEWIS

Washington, Nov. 18—The big flurry caused by the disclosure this week that more than a year ago the Administration rejected a North Viet Nam peace offer is getting out of hand.

Now there is a planted report that the Administration did about the same thing with a Hanoi offer passed along by the French last May. Next big planted surprise from "dove" sources is likely to be to the effect that we also rejected a "peace feeler" relayed by Ghana's President Nkrumah last August.

What is the real lowdown on our key rejection—that of a year ago—when UN Secretary General U Thant reported that Hanoi was then prepared to send an emissary in Rangoon?

For some strange reason—a national security requirement perhaps—the Administration so far has come up with only furtive, awkward explanations. They are along the line that at the time, on the basis of "the total evidence available to us," this government was absolutely convinced North Viet Nam was not prepared for serious peace talks.

State Department spokesman Robert J. McCloskey embellished this hazy clarification by pointing out that in his opinion Secre-Dean Rusk could figure out with his electrified mind that Hanoi didn't want to talk business.

It is high time that the Administration found some way of laying the real facts on the line. There should be nothing to conceal in the known fact that the Pentagon, the State Department and the White House have absolute confidence in our intelligence apparatus.

So it was on the basis of intelligence reports—much from Central Intelligence Agency operatives, of course—that we decided a year ago that the Asiatic Communists had no intention of seriously negotiating a peace formula. And it is on the same basis that the Administration is of exactly the same view today.

If It Can't Be Relied On, Junk It

After all, since this country spends more than a billion dollars a year to keep this spy apparatus functioning, if it can't be relied on it should be junked.

There has been, incidentally, much made in the last few days of



Robert J. McCloskey
Cites "sensitive antenna"

the fact that U Thant in February of this year came up with another peace talk offer of some kind. And that this got nowhere either.

The reason can be pinpointed. In late February, the White House and Secretary Rusk had more evidence that such trial balloons out of Hanoi were phony.

All the "evidence" was to that effect, not only what our agents in North Viet Nam had reported, but what we had learned in Warsaw—the one capital where Hanoi and U. S. diplomats can make contact effectively. The conclusion was that Red China and North Viet Nam wanted to escalate the war, not settle it.

What disturbed officials here was that U Thant, British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and our UN ambassador at the time, the late Adlai Stevenson, seemed mesmerized into peace-at-any-price stance and wouldn't go for Washington's hard evidence concerning the real Communist line.

This was disturbing because the word got passed around in foreign chancelleries that Johnson and Rusk were refusing to take a chance on even preliminary peace-feeler talks.

Then Johnson Made His Baltimore Statement

The net result, of course, was Johnson's pronouncement in his April 7 speech at Baltimore that we were ready to begin "unconditional discussions" with North Viet Nam.

Nevertheless, at the time that address was made and hailed as quite significant, the solid evidence this Administration had at hand remained the same—that despite the Communist planted window-dressing, there was no sincere willingness to negotiate.

Why, then, be trapped into a phony peace talk of any kind, in Rangoon or anywhere, when it was clear from all our intelligence information that the Red idea of negotiations was for us to get out of South Viet Nam?

There has been an effort made by some lower-rung Administration officials to make it appear that there was a marked policy shift as a result of Johnson's April "unconditional" speech.

Before that address, the Administration, it was said, was not particularly interested in any peace talks of any kind, hence the rejection of U Thant's 1964 and early 1965 proposals. But after the speech, Hanoi refused to make an approach of any kind.

Reds Determined to Keep On Fighting

This is basically hogwash. Our intelligence information from the start has shown the Communists, both in Peking and Hanoi, to be unswerving in their determination to win the war and, in addition, confident of victory in the long run.

It has never, at any time, been necessary to raise Rusk's sensitive "antenna" to determine this.

And in some knowledgeable quarters it is felt that Johnson would not have made his "unconditional discussions" offer except on the basis of evidence that it wouldn't get anywhere—except to satisfy for awhile the "doves" at home and abroad.

The important part of that speech, when it is remembered the Administration had "evidence" certainly of what was going on in the Asian Communist world, was never stressed, for obvious diplomatic reasons.

This was Johnson's spelling out firmly of a hard line, namely that we would stay in South Viet Nam, and fight there, until that nation's independence and freedom was guaranteed beyond doubt.

"We will not be defeated, we will not withdraw, either openly or under the cloak of meaningless agreement," the President said. That statement in itself was an obstacle to any further peace feelers of the type relayed by U Thant. For peace talks, even on a preliminary basis, would have to be on that foundation.